

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 3318

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, KS, US
SUBJECT: THE MOOD IN KOREA: A NEED FOR CLARIFICATION

1. AT THE END OF THIS TELEGRAM I HAVE REPEATED THE FULL TEXT OF AN ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE APRIL 21 EDITION OF THE KOREAN HERALD. AS WILL BE NOTED, IT IS FULL OF SPECULATION AND DRAWS NUMEROUS LINKAGES WHICH DO NOT EXIST. I AM CONCERNED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS ARTICLE IS TYPICAL OF THE SPECULATION RAMPANT IN SEOUL AT THE PRESENT TIME. IT APPEARS OBVIOUS TO ME THAT WE NEED TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN CLARIFYING OUR POSITION ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES TO INSURE, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THAT SUCH SPECULATION WILL NOT CONTINUE. FOR US TO FAIL TO MAKE A PUBLIC EFFORT AT THIS JUNCTURE COULD LEAD KOREAN PUBLIC TO MAKE SERIOUS MISJUDGMENT AS A RESULT OF UNSUBSTANTIATED FEARS. WE HAVE MADE OUR POINTS TO THE FOREIGN OFFICE AND IN OTHER OFFICIAL CHANNELS BUT I BELIEVE IT IMPORTANT THAT WE DO IT IN A MORE PUBLIC MANNER.

2. THE POINTS I WOULD HOPE TO ADDRESS WOULD BE THE FOLLOWING:

(A) THE TITO INITIATIVE. WHILE I REALIZE IT IS DIFFICULT TO TREAT THE PRESIDENTIAL CONVERSATION IN A PUBLIC FORM, I BELIEVE WE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE CLEAR
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THAT THE TITO INITIATIVE ORIGINATES WITH THE YUGOSLAVS, THAT OUR WILLINGNESS TO HAVE THEM EXPLORE THIS OPTION IS NOT A CHANGE IN U.S. POLICY AND THAT THE U.S. REMAINS COMMITTED TO ACTING TOWARD THE NORTH ONLY IN FULL AND COMPLETE COOPERATION WITH THE ROKG.

(B) ON THE PING-PONG REPORT I WOULD HOPE TO STRESS

THAT THIS IS A PRIVATE UNDERTAKING NOT SPONSORED OR SUPPORTED BY THE USG AND THAT THE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE WAS NOT FORWARDED THROUGH GOVERNMENT CHANNELS. WITH RESPECT TO OUR NOT HAVING MENTIONED THE INVITATION TO THE ROK DURING THE EIGHT MONTHS SINCE WE FIRST LEARNED OF IT, IF ASKED I WOULD PLAN TO CHARACTERIZE THIS AS AN OVERSIGHT ON THE PART OF A LOW RANKING OFFICER WHO RECEIVED A QUERY ON TRAVEL AND DID NOT APPRECIATE THE POSSIBLE CONNECTION WHICH MIGHT BE MADE WITH THE EARLIER U.S. TEAM VISIT TO CHINA. SENIOR OFFICIALS WERE NOT INFORMED; HOWEVER, THERE WAS NO INTENT TO CONCEAL THIS INFORMATION FROM THE ROK.

(C) I WOULD HOPE TO CHARACTERIZE THE DISCUSSIONS WITH CEAUSESCU AS BEING A RETURN TO A MORE FAMILIAR HARD-LINE APPROACH OF THE NORTH AND IN NO WAY TIED IN WITH THE YUGOSLAV INITIATIVE. IN THIS MANNER I WOULD HOPE TO DISPEL THE CONCERN THAT WE ARE BEING SUBJECTED TO A CLEVER NORTH KOREAN TRICK IN THIS REGARD.

3. I HAVE CONSIDERED TWO OPTIONS FOR MAKING PUBLIC U.S. POSITION ON THESE ISSUES. FIRST, AND MY PREFERRED, WOULD BE TO GRANT AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW TO AN AMERICAN REPORTER WHO I AM CONFIDENT WILL PRESENT OUR VIEWS IN A STRAIGHTFORWARD MANNER. SUCH AN INTERVIEW WOULD THEN BE PLAYED BACK IN THE KOREAN PRESS. SECOND OPTION WOULD BE TO HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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PRESS BRIEFING FOR KOREAN REPORTERS TO COVER THE SAME POINTS. I AM CONCERNED HERE THAT REPORTERS THEMSELVES MIGHT NOT ACCURATELY REPORT OUR VIEWS OR THAT EDITORIAL SUPERVISION MIGHT RESULT IN A SKEWED OR GREATLY ABBREVIATED COVERAGE. AN ADDITIONAL OPTION I REALIZE WOULD BE FOR SUCH A BRIEFING TO BE HANDLED BY THE DEPARTMENT AT AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL AND I WOULD HAVE NO OBJECTION TO SUCH A COURSE IF IT WERE CONSIDERED MORE EXPEDIENT.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: I WOULD APPRECIATE AUTHORIZATION TO ENGAGE IN A MUCH FULLER PUBLIC EXPLANATION OF OUR POSITION ALONG THE LINES DESCRIBED ABOVE AND USING THE EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW FORMAT.

5. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF KOREAN HERALD ARTICLE OF APRIL 21:

BEGIN TEXTC

PLAYING INTO PYONGYANG HANDS.

PING-PONG BID SEEN POLITICAL.

BY YUN IK-HAN.

THE U.S. DECISION TO SEND A PING-PONG TEAM TO NORTH KOREA NEXT SPRING CAME AT A TIME WHEN THE KOREAN PENINSULA IS FINDING ITSELF INCREASINGLY PALPABLE IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS.

THIS BACKDROP LEADS ONE TO ATTACH A POLITICAL IMPLICATION TO THE AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PYONGYANG-HOSTED PING-PONG GAME -- EVEN IF IT IS NOT A PREMEDITATED SCENARIO IT CAN BE EXPLOITED POLITICALLY.

THE DECISION -- ALTHOUGH NOT ONE MADE BY THE U.S.
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GOVERNMENT -- FOLLOWED PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER'S SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH EAST EUROPEAN LEADERS WHO REPORTEDLY TALKED WITH HIM ON THE KOREAN QUESTION.

ROMANIAN PRESIDENT NICOLAE CEAUSESCU MET WITH PRESIDENT CARTER LAST WEEK IN WASHINGTON ON THE HEELS OF ANOTHER AMERICAN TRIP MADE BY YUGOSLAVIAN PRESIDENT JOSIP BROZ TITO TWO MONTHS EARLIER.

SOME PEOPLE, WHO VIVIDLY REMEMBER WHAT THE AMERICANS DID WITH TABLE TENNIS IN PEKING IN 1971, TEND TO CALL THE FORTHCOMING AMERICAN VISIT TO PYONGYANG "ANOTHER PING-PONG DIPLOMACY".

BUT OTHERS REMAIN CAUTIOUS AND DO NOT DUB IT THAT WAY SO QUICKLY. NEVERTHELESS, THEY DOUBT THE WISDOM OF WASHINGTON IN HAVING SO HURRIEDLY RESPONDED TO NORTH KOREA'S SIGNAL SENT THROUGH THE EAST EUROPEAN LEADERS.

THE EXPERTS, SPECIALIZING IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, BELIEVE THAT SUCH A U.S. ATTITUDE MUST HAVE BEEN MOTIVATED BY AN URGENT NEED TO HAMMER OUT A DIPLOMATIC STUNT OVERSEAS IN THE FACE OF FORMIDABLE SKEPTICISM PREVAILING AT HOME ON THE WISDOM OF PULLING AMERICAN TROOPS OUT OF KOREA ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S SCHEDULE.

THEIR THEORY IS THAT PRESIDENT CARTER NEEDS TO DEVISE DIPLOMATIC MACHINERY THAT CAN ALLAY THE WORRIES OF THOSE OPPOSING ANY HASTY TROOP WITHDRAWAL. PARTICULARLY WITH THE BY-ELECTIONS ONLY SIX MONTHS AWAY, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION MUST FIND IT NECESSARY TO SHOW THE VOTERS THAT IT HAS ACTED SMARTLY OVERSEAS. TO THIS END, IN THE EYES OF THE OBSERVERS, CARTER MAY THINK THAT A CLIMATE
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MUST BE FORGED -- IF NOT SUBSTANTIAL THEN AT LEAST FOR
COSMETIC PURPOSES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SEOUL 3318

ALONG WITH SUCH DOMESTIC POLITICS-ORIENTED OBJECTIVES,
CARTER MUST HAVE IN MIND THE U.S. RELATIONS WITH THE
SOVIET UNION WHICH ARE AT THEIR LOWEST EBB IN RECENT
YEARS IN THE DEADLOCKED SALT NEGOTIATIONS.

EITHER FOR BARGAINING PURPOSES OR REAL STRATEGIC REASONS
OF HAVING TO CHECK THE RUSSIANS, THE AMERICANS MAY FIND THE
NEED ACUTE TO BEEF UP THE ANTI-SOVIET CONTAINMENT CAMP --
COMMUNIST CHINA. THIS NEED NATURALLY COUNTS IN NORTH
KOREA, WHOSE GEOPOLITICAL POSITION BORDERING BOTH COUNTRIES
CONSTITUTES A SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATION IN THE SINO-RUSSIAN
RIVALTY.

IN THIS VEIN, THE UNITED STATES MAY BE CONTEMPLATING
HOW TO EDGE NORTH KOREA TO THE CHINESE SIDE, THE OBSERVERS
SAY.

ALL THIS HAS NOT GONE WITHOUT BEING NOTICED BY THE
RUSSIANS: SOVIET PRESIDENT LEONID I. BREZHNEV MADE A
FAR EASTERN TRIP LAST MONTH TO DEMONSTRATE THE RUSSIAN
RESOLVE.

HE USED VLADIVOSTOK -- THE SOVIET MAIN FAR EASTERN

NAVAL BASE LOCATED ONLY 60 KM AWAY FROM THE CHINESE
BORDER -- TO SEND WARNING SIGNALS. BREZHNEV'S TRIP
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INCLUDED WATCHING ROCKET TEST-FIRING AND VIEWING MILITARY
INSTALLATIONS IN THE VICINITY OF THE SENSITIVE SOVIET-
CHINESE BORDER.

THE LATEST SCENE MADE AN IRONICAL CONTRAST WITH THE
ONE WHEN FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT GERALD FORD VISITED THE
NAVAL PORT IN DECEMBER 1974 TO MEET WITH BREZHNEV BY WAY
OF SOUTH KOREA WHERE HE RECONFIRMED THE U.S. SECURITY
COMMITMENT TO SEOUL. AT THAT TIME, FORD AND BREZHNEV
LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR GOING AHEAD WITH THE SALE TALKS.

MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT CARTER'S
ELECTION PLEDGE TO PHASE OUT THE AMERICAN TROOPS FROM
KOREA WAS ALSO BASED ON HIS INTENTION TO HAVE HIS
ADMINISTRATION LOOK FRESH AS COMPARED WITH THE POLICY
FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER PURSUED THROUGH
THE EMPLOYMENT OF A POWER BALANCE CONCEPT.

BEFORE GETTING A QUID PRO QUO FROM THE OTHER SIDE,
PRESIDENT CARTER SHOWED HIS CARD FIRST -- THE WITHDRAWAL
OF THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN KOREA.

THIS CARD -- SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE IN MUSTERING VOTES
AT HOME -- DID NOT WORK WELL AND MANY, ESPECIALLY THOSE
IN THE MILITARY HIERARCHY, DID NOT HESITATE TO QUESTION
THE WISDOM OF THE TROOP PULLOUT.

AS CARTER HAS STAKED TOO MUCH ON HIS TROOP PHASEOUT
PLEDGE, HE SEEMS TO BE INTENT ON REALIZING IT AT ANY
EXPENSE.

KIM IL-SUNG OF NORTH KOREA, WHO HAS LONG BEEN
ACCUSTOMED TO WALKING THE TIGHT ROPE OF THE EVER-
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SHARPENING RIVALRY BETWEEN THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE,
DID NOT MISS A CHANCE TO EXPLOIT THESE DEVELOPMENTS.

KIM HAS STEPPED UP HIS SIGNALS TO WASHINGTON TO HAVE
DIRECT TALKS SINCE HE FIRST INDICATED THIS IN 1975
THROUGH HIS FOREIGN MINISTER HO DAM. PYONGYANG INSISTED
THAT SEOUL BE EXCLUDED FROM ANY CONTACT BETWEEN NORTH

KOREA AND WASHINGTON.

BUT EXPECTEDLY THE UNITED STATES REMAINED ADAMANT THAT SUCH CONTACT COULD NOT BE CONCEIVABLE UNLESS SOUTH KOREA IS REPRESENTED.

AS PREMEDITATED, PYONGYANG GRADUALLY DROPPED THE CONDITION OF EXCLUDING SOUTH KOREA AS IF IT WERE SO WILLING TO TALK ABOUT THE KOREAN ISSUE AT THE CONVERSATION TABLE.

WHILE REPEATEDLY SENDING CALLS FOR THE SO-CALLED THREE-PARTY CONFERENCE THROUGH EAST EUROPEAN LEADERS, NORTH KOREA HAS REFUSED TO COMPLY WITH SEOUL'S BID TO RESUME THE SOUTH-NORTH DIALOGUE WHICH IT SUSPENDED IN 1973 WITHOUT GIVING REASONS. NORTH KOREA WATCHERS EVALUATE THAT THE NORTH KOREANS MUST HAVE SUSPENDED THE DIALOGUE FROM THE CONCLUSION THAT CONTINUATION OF TALKS WOULD NOT SERVE THEIR ORIGINAL GOAL OF UNIFYING THE WHOLE PENINSULA UNDER COMMUNIST RULE.

BUT PYONGYANG COULD NOT AFFORD TO IGNORE INTERNATIONAL OPINION; IT HAS PURSUED PROPAGANDA-TAILORED BIDS WHILE SHUTTING THE DOOR WHENEVER THINGS MOVED TOWARD ANY PRACTICAL DEVELOPMENT.

NORTH KOREA APPEARS TO HAVE DELIBERATELY SHUNNED PRODUCING ANY PRACTICAL CONDITIONS FOR OPENING THE TRIPARTITE PARLEY - AMONG SEOUL, PYONGYANG AND WASHINGTON - IN A SUBTLE MANEUVERING TO GET THINGS STOPPED BEFORE CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY MAKE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS EXCEPT FOR EXPLORING A DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE UNITED STATES.

THE EXPERTS REGARD SUCH TACTICS AS BEING AIMED AT ALIENATING SOUTH KOREA FROM THE UNITED STATES WHILE HEIGHTENING PYONGYANG'S VOICE AND RELATIVE STATUS.

WHATEVER CONCESSIONS THE UNITED STATES MAY MAKE TO NORTH KOREA, THE OBSERVERS DOUBT WHETHER THE PYONGYANG REGIME WILL RALLY GO ALONG IN THE DIRECTION THE AMERICANS WANT.

KIM IL-SUNG IS REPORTDLY PLANNING A VISIT TO MOSCOW IN THE NEAR FUTURE WHILE THE RUSSIANS REMIND PYONGYANG HOW IS HAS HELPED IT SO FAR. THIS CAMPAIGN TO GIVE A GOOD IMPRESSION IS ACCELERATING RECENTLY.

THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA DECLARED AN OPEN-DOOR POLICY IN 1973 UNDER WHICH IT MAINTAINS THE FOUR MAJOR POWERS -

WASHINGTON, TOKYO, MOSCOW AND PEKING - SHOULD RECOGNIZE
BOTH SOUTH AND NORTH KORA ALIKE WITH A VIEW TO KEEPING
THE PENINSULA STABLE POLITICALLY.

AS FOR THE U.S. DECISION TO SEND ITS PING-PONG
DELEGATION TO PYONGYANG, THE EXPERTS HOLD THE VIEW
THAT IT IS REALISTICALLY UNDESIRABLE FOR THE UNITED
STATES TO DO SO AT A TIME WHEN THE SOVIETS AND CHINESE
STILL SHUN RECIPROCAL ACTION TOWARD SOUTH KOREA.

THE OBSERVERS' VIEW IS THAT ANY HASTY APPROACH
TO NORTH KOREA IS FEARED TO RESULT IN DAMAGING THE
PRESTIGE OF WASHINGTON WITHOUT ACTUALLY GOING INTO
ANY SUBSTANTIAL DEVELOPMENT. END TEXT.
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